

MAIL FAILURES.

REPORT

FROM

THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,

RELATIVE TO THE

Frequent failure of mails between Washington city and New Orleans.

MARCH 12, 1844.

Read, and laid upon the table.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, *March 9, 1844.*

SIR: A resolution of the House of Representatives, of the 22d of January, requires that the Postmaster General "present to the House of Representatives the reasons and causes, so far as the same may be known to the department, of the frequent failures of the mail between the city of Washington and New Orleans; and that he suggest what means, under the control of the department, exist to ensure a more regular delivery of the mail; and whether it is contemplated to change the mode of transportation of the mail over any portion of the above-named route."

I have thought I could best meet the requirements of said resolution by a statement of the contracts for transporting the mail over this line, which I found in existence when I assumed the discharge of the duties of this department, and also the contracts made, or attempted to be made, for the current four years, from the 1st of July, 1843, before I proceed to point out the prominent causes which have interrupted the regularity of the mails between Washington city and New Orleans. A contract existed with Black & Co. to transport the mails from Washington city, by steamboat, to Poto-mac creek, thence by stages to Fredericksburg, daily, for the annual compensation of \$15,690. From Fredericksburg to Richmond, Virginia, the mail was transported on the railroad at a compensation of \$14,725. From Richmond to Petersburg, in like manner, for the compensation of \$5,511. From Petersburg to Weldon, the mail was transported on railroad for the sum of \$13,775. From Weldon to Charleston, by Wilmington, the mail was transported for the sum of \$45,000, by railroad and steamboat. Between Charleston and Augusta, it was conveyed on railroad, at a cost of \$27,950. From Augusta to Madison, in Georgia, the mail was carried on the railroad at a charge of \$25,294. From Madison to Mobile, it was transported in stages at a contract cost of \$63,162; and from Mobile to New Or-

leans, the mail was transported in steamboats at \$70,000. The whole distance is computed at 1,378 miles. The time allowed by the contracts was 71½ days, or 7 days and 8 hours; and the aggregate cost was \$281,107 per annum.

Contracts for the transportation of the mail, on a part of this line, were let under advertisements, according to law, in April, 1843, to go into operation the 1st day of July, 1843, at the following sums:

Between Washington and Aquia creek	-	-	-	\$12,752
Between Aquia creek and Richmond	-	-	-	19,500
Between Richmond and Petersburg	-	-	-	5,818
Between Petersburg and Weldon	-	-	-	15,200
Between Weldon and Charleston	-	-	-	75,000
Between Charleston and Augusta	-	-	-	33,012
Between Augusta and Madison	-	-	-	25,150
Between Madison and Columbus	-	-	-	15,400

The contracts for the remainder of the line were made the previous year, between Columbus and Mobile, at the sum of - 48,270

And between Mobile and New Orleans, the contract was renewed under a joint resolution of Congress, for four years, at the rate of, per annum, - 70,000

Making an aggregate sum of - 320,102

The contract time for the service is 7 days 8½ hours. This time was divided in such proportions between the several contractors, as was believed best calculated to produce certainty and regularity of service.

The great difficulty in the service has arisen from the failures upon that part of the line between Weldon and Charleston. It will be seen that, for the four years prior to July, 1843, the service on this part of the line was at a cost of \$45,000; and, by contract, was to be performed in 29½ hours in one direction, and 30 hours in the other. After considerable difficulty, and not until the department had submitted its ultimatum to this company, accompanied by a declaration that, if not accepted, the mail would be transferred to the road running by Raleigh, in North Carolina, to Columbia, in South Carolina, in coaches, this company reduced their demands from the price first asked, to \$75,000, and assumed the service at that sum; and, as the department understood, to be performed in 30 hours in one direction, and 32 hours in the other. The department fully expected that, after an increase of \$30,000 in the compensation to this company, and the additional time allowed, the service would be as well, if not better, performed than under the former contract. In this just expectation it has been disappointed. When the penalties were exacted for failures to make connexions by this company, the directors met and resolved to abandon the service, and notified the department of their purpose.

Efforts have been made to induce this company to enter into contract stipulations according to the terms which previous negotiations of the department with it had designated; but, as yet, without success, though they have continued to carry the mail.

This company insist upon more time; and, after every reasonable effort made with the companies north and south of Washington, the department has been unable to allow more time than that specified above, without producing almost certain detention of the mail twenty-four hours at Charleston, going south, and a like detention at Weldon and Washington, going north.

It is believed that, with suitable boats and energetic management, the time proposed is sufficient to perform the service regularly and certainly.

There are other causes of failure, upon other portions of the line, incident to railroad, steamboat, and coach transportation. One of them was adverted to in my annual report, and it is this: A failure upon any one of the railroads or steamboats causes a double mail to be thrown upon the stage at Madison, often too large to be transported in a single coach; a part has to be left, and thereby produces irregularity in the mails south of that point.

Exhibit A is a synopsis of the failures and their causes, upon this route, so far as they are known at this department. It is proper that I should state that, for such as the department deemed inexcusable, fines have been imposed upon the contractors.

Among the many causes for the failure of this mail, it is scarcely necessary that I should advert to the extraordinary season through which we have just passed. The immense quantity of rain, particularly in the southwest, not only rendered the dirt roads almost impassable, but flooded the streams, and swept off bridges, often presenting a physical impossibility to the transit of the mail.

I submit documents B, C, D, &c., to show what efforts the department and its agents have made, in order to insure the regular transmission of the mail on this line.

The latter branch of the resolution requires the Postmaster General to suggest what means, under the control of the department, exist to insure a more regular delivery of the mail; and whether it is contemplated to change the mode of transportation.

Upon the present line I do not hope for regularity in the service. It is impossible that more time can be allowed the Charleston and Wilmington company. I have essayed to lengthen the time between Washington city and Charleston, by the use of one more day; but this is objected to by the railroads, who cannot consent to delay the travel between Weldon and Baltimore so long. The only means within the power of the department, is to send the mail by Raleigh, and re-establish the old metropolitan route to Columbia, South Carolina; thence on the railroad to Charleston and to Augusta. The effect of this arrangement would be to delay the mail to Charleston from the north about thirty hours, and make for that city a very inconvenient, if not injurious, mail arrangement with New Orleans. I have bids accepted for this service, and have deferred transferring the mail, under the hope that the deep interest which the Wilmington company and the commercial community of Charleston have at stake, would prompt them to some exertion to put into this service competent boats, suited to the navigation of Cape Fear river and the sea. Should not this be done, or some improvement in the service be made, I shall feel it my imperative duty to transfer the service to the Raleigh and Columbia route; believing it is better to have a regular mail to New Orleans in nine days, than irregularity arising from an attempt to run the mail through in eight days.

It is fit I should state that a press of business upon this department, and my own indisposition, must plead the apology for not sooner responding to the resolution of the House of Representatives.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. A. WICKLIFFE.

HON. JOHN W. JONES,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

A.

Synopsis of the number of failures, and their causes, upon the route between Washington and New Orleans.

Mail routes.	Mode of service.	Number of failures.	Reasons and causes assigned for them.
Route No. 2,401— Washington city to Aquia Creek, Va.	Steamboat.	2	Gales of wind, and waiting for cars.
Route No. 2,422— Aquia Creek to Richmond, Va.	Railroad.	1	Engine springing a leak.
Route No. 2,424— Richmond to Pe- tersburg, Va.	Railroad.	4	Snow, sleet—tender ran off the track—heavy frost— engine out of order.
Route No. 2,439— Petersburg to Wel- don, N. C.	Railroad.	3	Snow—conductor intoxica- ted—frost, rain, hail.
Route No. 2,822— Weldon to Charles- ton, S. C.	Railroad and steamboat.	11	Heavy sea, boisterous winds —fog—dark night—boat aground—frost on railroad track—cars ran off—axle of engine broke—cars thrown off and dashed to pieces.
Route No. 3,125— Charleston to Au- gusta, Georgia.	Railroad.	1	Engine, being new, did not work well.
Route No. 3,251— Augusta to Madi- son, Georgia.	Railroad.	1	Awful night—rain fell in torrents.
Route No. 3,294— Madison to Colum- bus, Georgia.	Four-horse post-coaches.	3	Heavy rain—high water— bad roads—coach broke down.
Route No. 5,478— Columbus to Mont- gomery, Alabama.	Four-horse post coaches.	2	High water.
Route No. 5,485— Montgomery to Mo- bile, Alabama.	Coaches and steamboat.	1	Carelessness.
Route No. 5,522— Mobile to New Or- leans, Louisiana.	Steamboat.	5	Steamboat aground.

B.

[Copy of circular sent to postmasters at the ends of routes between Washington, D. C., and New Orleans, La.]

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
Inspection Office, August 8, 1843.

SIR: The Postmaster General directs that, in all cases of the failure of the great north and south mail to arrive at your office in time to save connexions, you report the fact to this office immediately, by letter, with the cause of the failure, if it can be ascertained.

J. S. SKINNER,
Third Assistant Postmaster General.

C.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
Inspection Office, November 15, 1843.

SIR: It is presumed that the numerous and vehement complaints of the press in relation to failures of the mail recently occurring almost daily on the Atlantic line of transportation, cannot fail to have attracted your notice.

These failures, happening chiefly between Petersburg and Charleston, have been unjustly attributed to defective arrangements, and want of liberality on the part of this department, by persons ignorant, or appearing to be ignorant, both of these arrangements and of the compensation allowed for performance of the service.

The schedules show that the stipulations with the contractors are at once liberal and exact; providing for a punctual delivery of the mail at every point along the whole line, without any unnecessary delay; and yet allowing time enough, as it is believed, under vigilant management, and with efficient engines and well-appointed boats, to prevent failures, unless under *very extraordinary* circumstances.

On your line, for example, of 330 miles, of which 160 is railroad transportation, the utmost average speed required either way is but eleven miles an hour.

Not satisfied with the information to be obtained from the registers sent weekly to the Inspection Office from each end of all the routes, and heretofore relied upon for account of all irregularities: such has been my solicitude to obviate all just ground of complaint, and to accomplish the utmost attainable degree of punctuality on the line in question, that orders were given, some months since, that *special reports* should be made at the time of their occurrence, of every failure involving a breach of connexion at any point between Washington and New Orleans, together with the cause of each, where it could be ascertained, and for which the postmasters were instructed to make particular inquiry.

These reports, I regret to say, manifest great delinquency on the part of your company, showing that, in the lapse of only thirty-four days past, prior to the 3d instant, the mail failed and the connexion was broken twenty four times—leaving out of the account three of the six failures within the same

time at Petersburg, stated by that company to have resulted from time lost in waiting beyond schedule time for your arrival at Weldon.

Frankness to you, as well as that desire for the good of the service, which candor and common sense may allow me to entertain, prompt me to suggest to you, respectfully, whether your subordinate agents may not have omitted in many cases to disclose to you the true causes of detention and failure.

This suggestion, I should add, is warranted by various official and other representations, made as well to this department by its accredited agents and others, as by travellers, through the public press of the country. In the state of things here presented, is it not obvious that the public mail, which, when regular in its transportation and delivery, deservedly ranks among the most useful of all public establishments, becomes, when contracts are negligently or inefficiently executed, justly obnoxious to public-censure and condemnation?

The objections urged to the deductions which have been made from your pay, bear witness that, as far as that could be relied upon as a remedy for the evil under consideration, the power to impose them has not been neglected; and the occasion requires me to say that the exercise of it will be yet more rigid in future.

If, however, the difficulties, of whatever character, which give rise to so many failures on the part of your company, be in their nature insurmountable, it is due alike to the public, and to all the parties concerned, that the fact be admitted, and that recourse be had by this department to some other line or mode of transportation, promising certainty, even though that be accomplished with some loss of time; and this, sir, is written to advise you, respectfully, that while I take pleasure in the acknowledgment of your disposition personally to accommodate the department, yet there must be improvement in the performance of their engagements on the part of your company, in a degree to satisfy the just expectations of the public, or an end must be put to the existing arrangements.

C. A. WICKLIFFE.

To EDW. B. DUDLEY, Esq., *Wilmington, N. C.*

D.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
Inspection Office, November 18, 1843.

SIR: Mortified at the repeated failures of the mail between Petersburg and Charleston, the postmasters at the end of each route between Washington and New Orleans, have been ordered to make special reports of all failures *as they occur*; and, on a view of these, it has been found that, since the first of last month, the connexion has been broken eight times on your route.

Without adverting here to the causes of failures in each case, there is too much reason to believe that they too frequently result from want of vigilance and care on the part of your agents, and from inefficient engines, and otherwise defective provision and arrangements to insure punctuality on the part of the company. If your engines be not too light, or otherwise ill constructed and insufficient, how does it happen that they are so often impeded by frost, while engines on other routes are not arrested by the same cause?

In any case, the magnitude of the mail, the compensation allowed for the transportation, and the impatience of the public at your uncertain and irregular performance of the service, all prompt me to invoke your special attention to the subject, and to insist on the adoption of some means of enforcing punctual performance of your engagements.

In the mean time, it is fair to warn you that I shall feel myself bound to give earnest of my anxiety on the subject, by a rigid exercise, however ineffectual it may prove, of all the powers as my command to cure the evil in question, while existing arrangements remain in force.

C. A. WICKLIFFE.

H. D. BIRD, Esq., *Petersburg, Va.*

E.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
Inspection Office, November 18, 1843.

SIR: Official representations, including those which have been prompted by your acknowledged vigilance, as well as other statements to the Postmaster General, have increased his anxiety in regard to the mail service between Charleston and Mobile; and he accordingly instructs me to advise you of his wish that you travel for personal inspection over so much of that line, and for such a length of time, as may enable you to designate the points where the service is imperfectly performed; and he further directs, in all cases where an immediate and thorough reform shall prove to be impracticable by a diligent and vigorous employment of the means at your command, that you make report to this department, with a view to the application of the proper corrective.

He persuades himself that it will not be necessary to remind you that the season is at hand which demands the utmost vigilance on the part of all the special agents of the department; and he trusts that the contractors will everywhere, and more especially on the great lines, unite to prevent all just grounds of complaint.

He particularly charges that you will admonish the drivers and contractors against leaving by the way, or at any of the offices, any portion of the mail, whether newspaper bags or other matter, for the purpose of taking the passengers; an offence of this kind not only subjects the contractor to a fine and the loss of his contract, but subjects the driver to the penalty imposed by the law for abandoning the mail.

J. S. SKINNER,

Third Assistant Postmaster General.

L. G. ALEXANDER, Esq.,

Special agent P. O. Department, Augusta, Ga.

F.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
Inspection Office, December 23, 1843.

SIR: The Postmaster General has referred to this office yours of the 12th instant, directing me to instruct you to leave New Orleans, on receipt

of this—keeping, as far as practicable, your person and views unknown; the better to do which, you will pay your passage, and travel over the road through Mobile, until you reach the end of the railroad at Madison, Georgia.

You will take with you every convenience for making full memoranda, and report to this office all that is material, which may fall under your observation, connected with the transportation of the mail through the route designated. It is apprehended here, that the failures to which you have reference *originate* chiefly between Wilmington, North Carolina, and Charleston, South Carolina. It is seen, for instance, that the mails failed at Charleston, in time to connect, on the 4th, 5th, 9th, and 12th December, going south. These failures result in an *accumulation* of mails at Madison, where coach transportation commences, in a mass which it may be impossible for them to take on.

Have you seen any *specification* of what the head of the department could do, that he has not done? You will be expected to make your report as full as practicable, and may be assured that a proper and just estimate is placed upon your laudable anxiety on this subject, and for the character of the service generally.

J. S. SKINNER,

Third Assistant Postmaster General.

P. S.—The following failures have occurred between Charleston and New Orleans since the 11th of November last: Failed at Charleston on the 11th and 30th November, and 4th, 5th, 9th, and 12th December. At Madison, 2d December; two canvass bags left at Madison 29th November, for which the contractors were fined \$20. Failed at Columbus 30th November. Failures at New Orleans 12th, 14th, 16th, 19th, 26th, and 29th November, and 2d December.

J. S. S.

SAMUEL M. BROWN, Esq.,

Special agent P. O. Dept., New Orleans, La.

G.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, *January 2, 1844.*

SIR: The Weldon, Wilmington, and Charleston Railroad and Steamboat Company have resolved to discontinue the transportation of the United States mail, unless allowed 33 hours for the performance of the trip in each direction. The effect of this will be, that as they now have 32 hours for the time of the trip going south, and are to arrive at Charleston at 8½ a. m., an hour must be added, and their arrival at Charleston, consequently, fixed at 9½ a. m. Your hour of departure for Augusta being 9 a. m., must necessarily be postponed until 10 a. m., or the mail and travel received from the north must lie at Charleston 23 hours before they can proceed to any parts south and west of it.

I am satisfied that, with adequate force on the route, and the proper arrangements faithfully observed, the time allowed by the present schedule for the performance of the trip between Weldon and Charleston would be sufficient. But the company will not consent to continue in the mail service, unless 33 hours to the trip be allowed them.

Before deciding whether this arrangement can be made, I must first ascertain if your company is willing to shift its hours of departure and arrival, on the trip going south, from 9 a. m. and 7 p. m., to 10 a. m. and 8 p. m.

If you decline making this alteration, the transportation of the mail over the Wilmington railroad and steamboat route will cease, of course; and the department will be compelled to resort again to the old coach route *via* Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Columbia, for the transportation of the great southern mail.

An early answer is respectfully solicited.

C. A. WICKLIFFE,
Postmaster General.

JAMES GADSDEN, Esq.,
President Charleston and Augusta R. R., Charleston, S. C.

H.

OFFICE OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA RAILROAD COMPANY,
Charleston, January 10, 1844.

SIR: Your letter of the 2d instant, addressed to Colonel Gadsden, has been duly received; and he being absent from the State for a few weeks, I caused the board of directors to be assembled as early as possible, and submitted the matter for their consideration. The board feel the strongest disposition to forward the public service, and, at the same time, to accommodate the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Company; but any hour of departure from Charleston for Augusta, later than 9 o'clock, a. m., would involve the necessity of travelling after night during the winter season, and that on the most unfavorable part of the road; and it has always been an established rule of the company, from which they have never departed, and cannot now consent to depart, not to run the cars at night, and particularly with passengers. The board, therefore, beg leave most respectfully to decline shifting the hours of departure and arrival, on the trip going south, from 9 a. m. and 7 p. m., to 10 a. m. and 8 p. m.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ALEXANDER MARYCK,

Chair. pro. tem. Board of Directors S. C. R. R. C.

Hon. C. A. WICKLIFFE,
Postmaster General.

I.

By direction of the Postmaster General, S. R. Hobbie, First Assistant Postmaster General, visited the directors of the Baltimore and Philadelphia Railroad Company, at the company's office in Philadelphia, on the 9th day of January, 1844, to obtain their consent to postpone the departure of their second daily trip from Baltimore to 9 p. m., instead of leaving that city for Philadelphia at 7 p. m. He explained to them that the object was to give three hours more time to the trip from Charleston to Weldon, which the two hours thus given by the Baltimore and Philadelphia company, and the

one hour's increased expedition between Weldon and Baltimore, would enable the department to do; and this arrangement was necessary to continue the mail on the railroad and steamboat route between Weldon and Charleston. After full statements and explanations by the First Assistant Postmaster General, the board took further time to consider. The following is their answer:

PHILADELPHIA, *January 15, 1844.*

DEAR SIR: I have submitted your request for the departure of our evening train from Baltimore to be delayed to 8 or 9 o'clock, to the executive committee of our board. After much reflection, and an anxious desire to meet your views, we are of the opinion that it would be destructive of the travel by that train during the winter, and altogether impracticable in the summer months, by steamboats leaving the city after dark, having to pass through a fleet of small craft, subjecting our passengers and boats to great peril, and always mulcted in damages for injuries done to other vessels. We regret that, under the circumstances, we cannot favorably meet your views.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

M. BROOKE BUCKLEY, *President.*

S. R. HOBBIE, Esq.,

First Assistant Postmaster General.

J.

AUGUSTA, GA., *January 17, 1844.*

I reached Augusta, Georgia, last evening from Washington city, via Raleigh, Fayetteville, N. C., Cheraw, Camden, and Columbia, S. C.; and I now deem it proper to inform you that my travels were extremely difficult, in consequence of the great floods of rain which have deluged the south for the past two or three weeks; and my confident opinion is, that a general suspension of mail transportation may be anticipated by the department in consequence. As far as I can learn, all the streams in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama, have overflowed their banks. The Savannah river was so much swollen this morning, as to deluge the town of Hamburg, S. C., producing a breach of connexion in the great mail going north; but it has fallen sufficiently during the day to admit of a connexion of the mail going south this afternoon.

L. G. ALEXANDER,

Special agent Post Office Department.

K.

AUGUSTA, GA., *January 19, 1844.*

SIR: The New Orleans mail failed to reach the Augusta (Georgia) distribution last night; and, doubtless, the failure has been caused by the recent floods of rain which have deluged the south generally. I am informed that

the great mail-route from Mobile, Alabama, to Madison, Georgia, is almost impassable; and I much fear that we may anticipate many failures of the great southern and northern mail for some time to come.

I shall leave Augusta to-night for the south, for the purpose of spending my time upon this important mail line, until a change of weather produces an improvement in the roads, and the present difficulty is over.

L. G. ALEXANDER,

Special agent Post Office Department.

J. S. SKINNER, Esq.,

Third Assistant Postmaster General.

L.

AUGUSTA, GA., *January 19, 1844.*

DEAR SIR: Since addressing you this morning, I have seen a gentleman just from Columbus, Georgia, who reports the mail-route from Madison to Columbus, Georgia, in such a bad condition as scarcely to permit the passage of a horse, without the incumbrance of a coach. He further states that he came up with two mail coaches, 16 miles from Madison, "entirely mired down" in a swamp, so that they could neither get *backward* nor *forward*. We have now *four* New Orleans mails due at this office, and I have no hope that any of them will reach us to night.

The train of mail cars has just arrived from Charleston, S. C., bringing us the northern mail; and I am happy to report that all the mails from that quarter are up to this date. I shall leave in a few minutes for the south.

L. G. ALEXANDER,

Special agent Post Office Department.

P. S. The Savannah river has fallen very much, but the weather is far from being settled; indeed, there is every prospect of a continuation of rain.

L. G. A.

Respectfully,

C. J. McNULTY,

Clerk of the Ho. of Reps. of the United States.

To the Hon. J. W. Jones,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Washington, March 2, 1844.

Sir: To your letter of the 7th, containing in a resolution of the House of Representatives, requesting you to ascertain, and report to the House, the extent to which the documents of the second and third sessions of the 27th Congress have not been copied and distributed, according to law, and whether the project of the last Congress has received consideration, we have the pleasure to reply:

1st. That the documents of the second session of the 27th Congress were

